

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

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INFO AMCONSUL KADUNA

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AMCONSUL IBADAN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PINS, NI

SUBJECT: GOWON INDEPENDENCE DAY SPEECH: POLITICAL ASPECTS

SUMMARY: MAJOR THRUST OF GOWON'S OCTOBER 1ST SPEECH WAS TO JUSTIFY INDEFINITE POSTPONEMENT TO RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE, RALLY MILITARY AND CIVILIAN SUPPORT AND DISCOURAGE ANY OPEN RESISTANCE. DESPITE INCENTIVE FOR POPULAR SUPPORT, TONE OF SPEECH WAS FAR FROM CONCILIATORY. FOR NEXT FEW MONTHS, AT LEAST, ANY THREATS TO REGIME APPEAR MANAGEABLE AND EMBASSY BELIEVES MILITARY WILL BE ABLE TO CONTAIN ANY DISSIDENT ELEMENTS. END SUMMARY.

1. GENERAL GOWON'S OCTOBER 1 INDEPENDENCE DAY ANNOUNCEMENT THAT RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE IN 1976 IS UNREALISTIC MARKS MILESTONE IN POST-WAR NIGERIAN HISTORY AND PRESAGES MILITARY CONTROL FOR INDEFINITE FUTURE. SLOW PROGRESS ON NINE-POINT FMG PROGRAM HAD VIRTUALLY GROUND TO HALT OVER CONTENTION
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RAISED BY CENSUS RESULTS, AND INCREASINGLY STRIDENT

SECTIONAL STATEMENTS OF ASPIRING POLITICIANS HAD RAISED SPECTRE OF RETURN TO POLITICAL INSTABILITY. IN NAME OF NATIONAL PEACE AND STABILITY GOWON OPTED FOR RETENTION OF POWER. WHILE STATING "WE HAVE NOT ABANDONED IDEA OF RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE", HE POSTPONED IT SINE DIE, CHARGING THAT POLITICIANS "HAVE NOT LEARNT ANY LESSON FROM OUR PAST EXPERIENCES". MAIN THRUST OF HIS OCTOBER 1 SPEECH WAS TO JUSTIFY POSTPONEMENT, RALLY MILITARY AND CIVILIAN SUPPORT AND DISCOURAGE OPPOSITION.

2. DODGING AMONG MOST SENSITIVE NATIONAL ISSUES, GOWON SOUGHT TO DIMINISH THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR IMMEDIATE AND INDEFINITE FUTURE. HIS FORMULATION OF REVENUE ALLOCATION SYSTEM AVOIDED CASTING THE MATTER IN CONSTITUTIONAL CONCRETE, PROVIDED FOR MORE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF OIL REVENUES, AND AT SAME TIME EASED SOME OF SENSITIVITY OVER CENSUS BY REDUCING WEIGHT ACCORDED POPULATION-COUNT IN DISTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL REVENUES. SIGNIFICANCE OF CENSUS IS FURTHER DIMINISHED BY APPARENT REMOTENESS OF REESTABLISHMENT OF PARLIAMENT. PANEL TO DRAW UP DRAFT CONSTITUTION WILL BE APPOINTED "IN DUE COURSE".

CREATION OF "A FEW MORE" STATES HAS SPECIFICALLY BEEN PROMISED BEFORE RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE AND FURTHER PRONOUNCEMENTS WILL BE MADE ON THIS, ALSO "IN DUE COURSE". MEANWHILE, THE BAN ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY REMAINS IN FORCE, AND A FEDERAL NEWSPAPER AND NEWS AGENCY WILL BE ESTABLISHED (PRESUMABLY AS A DEFENSE AGAINST POLITICALLY-CONTROLLED MEDIA).

3. WHILE THUS SEEKING TO DELAY AND DEFUSE THE MOST TROUBLE-SOME NATIONAL ISSUES, GOWON OFFERED SOMETHING TO ALMOST EVERYONE (EXCEPT POLITICIANS). EMPHASIZING IMPORTANCE OF PEACE AND STABILITY FOR RAPID ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, GOWON DEVOTED FIRST TWO-THIRDS OF SPEECH TO RECAPITULATION OF PAST FMG ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND SHAPE OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENTAL TARGETS (SEPTEL) AIMED TO BENEFIT ALL NIGERIANS. HE IMPLIED THAT BY JANUARY, WHEN FMG EXPECTS TO COMPLETE ITS STUDY OF UDOJI REPORT, THERE WILL BE MAJOR (AND PERHAPS RETROACTIVE) INCREASE IN CIVIL SERVICE SALARIES. WAGES AND CONDITIONS OF ARMED SERVICE WILL ALSO BE REVIEWED. DELAY OF REPLACEMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF MOST FEDERAL COMMISSIONERS BY MILITARY AND POLICE OFFICERS UNTIL JANUARY MAY SOFTEN PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF MOVE TO REPLACE SOME RESTIVE POLITICIANS, AND THE REPLACEMENT SHUFFLE OF MILITARY GOVERNORS IN APRIL SHOULD BRING IN SOME NEW FACES AND EASE PRESSURES WITHIN THE MILITARY. RELEASE OF MILITARY DETAINEES WILL TAKE THE HEAT OFF THIS ISSUE, WIN IBO APPROVAL AND COST LITTLE. PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE COUNCILS TO ADVISE FEDERAL AND STATE

GOVERNMENTS WAS THROWN IN TO HELP CREATE IMPRESSION OF
RESPONSIVENESS TO POPULAR WILL.

4. WHILE REACTION HAS THUS FAR BEEN LIMITED, IT IS CLEAR
GOWON WILL HAVE SUPPORT OF MILITARY, POLICE AND MANY
BUREAUCRATS WITH VESTED INTERESTS IN PRESENT REGIME. LABOR
APPEARS PREPARED TO WAIT AND SEE FINAL RESULTS OF UDOJI
REPORT REVIEW. REACTION FROM THE NORTH HAS BEEN GENERALLY
FAVORABLE, AND WHILE RIVERS AND MIDWEST STATES WILL BELLOW
OVER REDUCTION OF THEIR SHARE OF LOCAL OIL REVENUES FROM
45 TO 20 PERCENT, GOWON HAS PROMISED ADEQUATE COVERAGE FOR
DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS. DESPITE INCENTIVES FOR POPULAR SUPPORT
OFFERED BY GOWON, TONE OF SPEECH WAS FAR FROM CONCILIATORY.
GOWON MADE IT CLEAR THAT MILITARY DECISION TO REMAIN IN POWER
WAS UNCHALLENGEABLE AND EMPHASIZED AS HE HAD SPONTANEOUSLY
SAID UPON HIS RETURN FROM CHINA (LAGOS 8792), HE WOULD TAKE
ANY STEPS NECESSARY TO ENSURE STABILITY, UNITY AND SURVIVAL
OF NATION. PRINCIPAL OPPOSITION PROBABLY EXISTS AMONG
POLITICIANS, STUDENTS AND PRESS, ESPECIALLY WESTERN STATE
YORUBAS. AMCONSUL IBADAN REPORTS THAT WHILE ELEMENTS OF
SPEECH TAKEN TOGETHER WILL TEND TO MOLLIFY MAJORITY OF
WESTERNERS, IT IS OBVIOUS THAT GOWON WAS REFERRING TO
AWOLOWO AND OTHER YORUBA POLITICAL LEADERS WHEN HE SPOKE
OF THOSE WHO HAD NOT LEARNED FROM THE PAST. STUDENTS HAVE
BEEN TRADITIONALLY HOSTILE TO MILITARY RULE AND SOME
DEMONSTRATION OF RESISTANCE CANNOT BE RULED OUT. FINALLY,
MANY JOURNALISTS HAVE YEARNED FOR RETURN OF PRESS FREEDOM
OF FIRST REPUBLIC AND WILL BE UNHAPPY WITH CONTINUATION (AND
PERHAPS INCREASE) OF GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS. OVERALL,
THESE THREATS APPEAR MANAGEABLE, AND FOR SHORT RUN AT
LEAST, WE BELIEVE FMG WILL BE ABLE TO CONTAIN ANY DISSIDENT
ELEMENTS.

REINHARDT

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